

Canoe and Mural



The Clifford Township Historical Society asked Michelle Jaconia McLain if she would paint a mural to be the background for a display of their canoe. Michelle enthusiastically agreed. She visited Mud Pond several times and read about the local Native Americans to get a feeling for the mural. She mixed her exterior latex paints and started the job at her studio on Route 106 just south of Clifford.

The more the project progressed, the more interested Michelle became in the Native American way of life, their customs, beliefs and skills. The mural content grew as Michelle did more and more research. After two months of painting all day and researching on the computer till the wee hours of the morning, the mural became much more than just a painting of Mud Pond.

Rabbits, turtles, snakes and woodchucks were all animals sacred to the Native Americans so those were not hunted. Eagles, elk, turkeys, stone tools, canoes for transportation, fire to cook food, fell trees and carve out canoes, natural fibers to make fishnets and baskets, pottery baked in wood coals, blackberries and nuts to eat were all essential parts of the Native American existence. Can you find these items in the mural?

The Native American village had a sweat hut (like today's sauna) and individual family living quarters with a main lodge for recreation and ceremonies. Children were considered a gift and the Native Americans believed that if the children were not properly cared for that they would be taken away. So in the mural the young boys are helping the men by carrying water for the fire, gathering wood and catching fish. The

girls are picking blackberries and helping their mother, thereby learning needed skills and feeling important to the success of the tribe.

Clifford Township Historical Society director Carol Gargan, PhD, with grant support from the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority and Pennsylvania Humanities Council, arranged for Dr. Marshall Becker, Emeritus Senior Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, to view and authenticate the content of the mural.

Little is known about the day-to-day activities of the local Native American tribes as they had no written language and left scant evidence of their presence here. Therefore, this depiction is a compilation of some of the known activities engaged in by the various tribes of the northeast.



Mud Pond as it appears today. Mud Pond is located on Halsey Road, Clifford Township, between Lake Idlewild and State Route 106. The pond is on private property, so trespassing is prohibited. However, the pond can be easily viewed from Halsey Road as the road bisects the pond. The dugout canoe was found in the section of water on the north side of the road.

This dugout canoe display is the result of a group effort that includes artist Michelle McLain's mural, the carpentry work of Larry Wilson and the support of the entire Board of Directors of the Clifford Township Historical Society and the Clifford Township Supervisors.

Brochure is produced with support from:





Clifford Township Historical Society
P.O. Box 161 Clifford PA 18413
679-2723 or 679-2870
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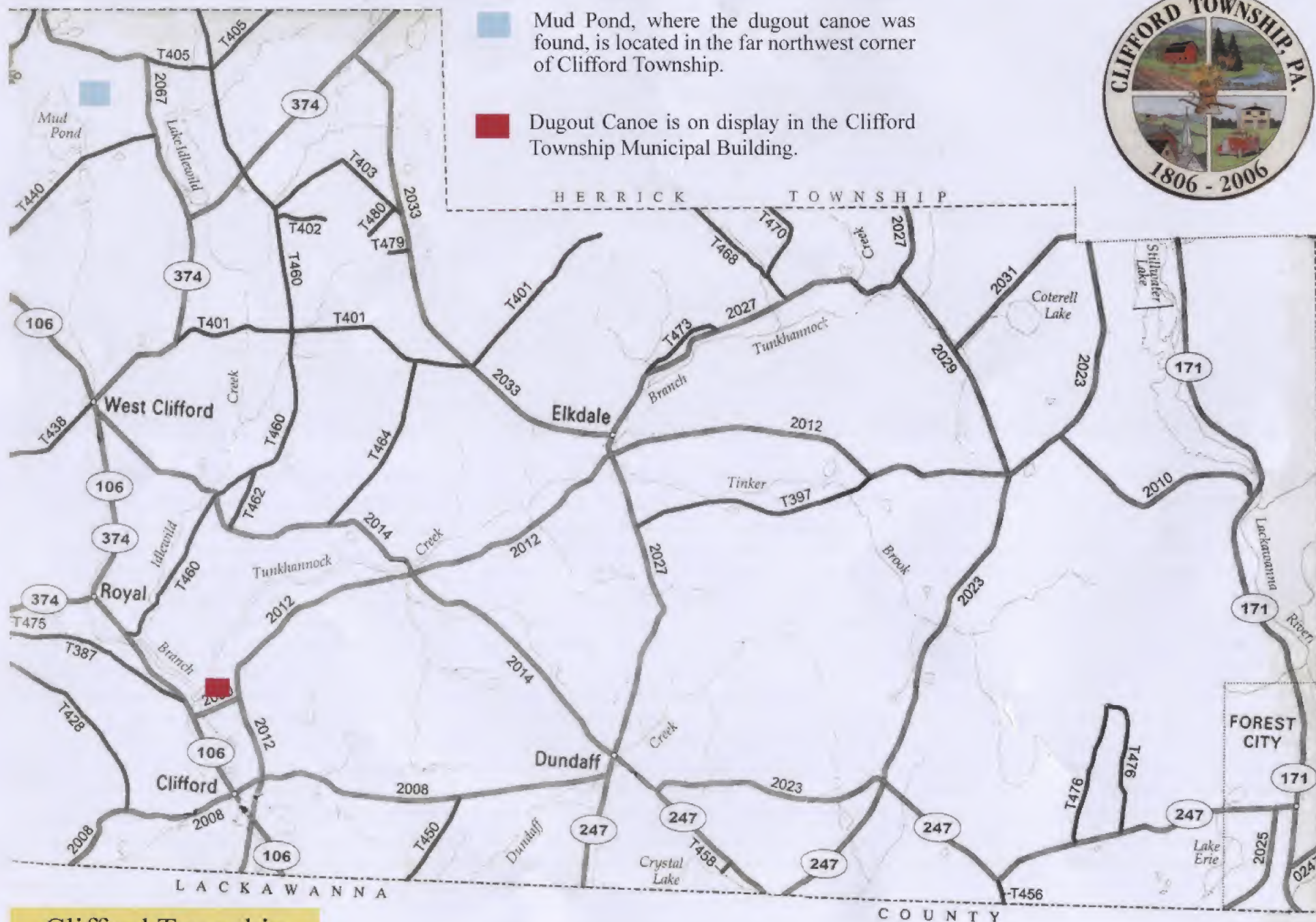


A core sample from the dugout canoe was taken by Dr. Carol Griggs of Cornell University. It is hoped that results of tests on the sample will provide a time frame which will help determine who may have carved the canoe. Preliminary tests age the pine dugout canoe at about 300 years.



 Mud Pond, where the dugout canoe was found, is located in the far northwest corner of Clifford Township.

 Dugout Canoe is on display in the Clifford Township Municipal Building.



Clifford Township

My name is Valerie Price Cole and this is the history of the Clifford Township Mud Pond Dugout Canoe.

In 1976 Vincent B. Halsey, using his own equipment, decided to enlarge the pond on his property. I believe it was called Mud Pond at the time. In the process, the original pond was drained down a bit. Mr. Halsey was in a row boat fishing with a buddy, Al Knott. (I'm thinking the fishing was pretty good with the water lowered.) They spotted one end of the dugout sticking out of the water on the far side of the pond across from the main house. I remember Vincent and Al had a running argument about which one of them saw it first. They were able to free it from the mud and towed it back across the pond to the main house. After it dried out a bit, Mr. Halsey elevated it on a pair of wooden construction horses in the shade of some old trees.

Later in the process, Vincent found a second partial canoe. This second one is even longer, but only one side was salvaged. He kept them together.

At the time, Mr. Halsey was very excited about his find. It was in wonderful condition. You could see a charred and chiseled area in one end. He contacted the Smithsonian and they gave him some information about how to preserve the wood, but they were not interested in dating it or acquiring it for their collection.

It stayed out in the weather for more than a year. During a severe thunderstorm, a large limb from a nearby tree came

crashing down and landed on the canoe. The damage was minimal, but I voiced my concern that the canoe was historically valuable and was going to be lost if it wasn't taken care of. I asked Mr. Halsey if he would consider selling it to me. He wasn't enthusiastic about the thought but didn't know what to do with it himself. We finally agreed on a trade. I had two healthy hives of bees. Vincent was an experienced beekeeper and taught me to keep bees as well. He agreed to trade his dugout canoes for my two hives of bees.

I enlisted my then friend, Jim Cole, and his father Elvin Cole from Clifford, to help transport the canoe. My mother Doreen Dunnier Price agreed to allow me to store it in her barn. Under Elvin's direction, we borrowed banding from the sawmill and strapped 2x4s to the top of the canoe to strengthen it, make it easier to handle and keep it together as it dried out.

It was very heavy, but Jim and Elvin managed to slide it onto a flatbed truck and drove it to the barn. It felt even heavier getting it off the truck and into the barn. It stayed there undisturbed for quite a few years until I saw a TV spot about the Everhart Museum in Scranton. They were all excited about a canoe that had been discovered in a local pond, and they were in the process of preserving it in Scranton. I called the Everhart, told them about our canoe found in Susquehanna County. They said they would like to come out and take a look.

A group of people from the Museum came out and carefully looked over our canoe. They said our preservation method had worked and we didn't need to do anything else. They said they wanted someone else with more experience in Native Americana to take a look. We agreed to that but never heard from them again.

During the original visit the Museum's experts explained that the Native Americans who were responsible for these canoes used them on their hunting, fishing and gathering trips at this glacial pond. When they were ready to leave for the season, they filled them with rocks and sunk them to protect and preserve the canoes until they were needed the next season.

My husband Jim and I continued to store the canoe and think about what should be done with it. We considered a donation to Old Mill Village Museum, but learned that as a state run facility, anything donated to them could be sold at any time. We wanted this canoe to remain a part of Susquehanna County and, even better, stay in Clifford Township.

Jim contacted Larry Wilson who was active in the Clifford Township Historical Society. He asked if the Historical Society would be interested in having a Native American dugout canoe, discovered locally, to display in the township.

The Historical Society took possession of the canoe and it was displayed for the first time at the Chautauqua held at Wiffy Bog Farm in July 2008.